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INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES IMMEDIATE
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 004635

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KNNP](#) [PARM](#) [MNUC](#) [FR](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH REACTION TO THE NIE ON IRAN'S NUCLEAR
PROGRAM: ELYSEE ENTHUSIASTIC, MFA CONCERNED

REF: STATE 163558

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) We passed the key judgments for the Iran nuclear NIE and accompanying non-paper to French MFA DAS-equivalent for the Middle East Franck Gellet late December 3 and followed up with an office call December 4 (when we gave him the secret releasable paper). We also gave the French Presidency Americas adviser Damien Loras copies of all the papers when PolMinCouns met with him December 4.

¶2. (C) Loras described the development as &incredible.8 He noted that some will now assert that this shows that the threat is less than we have claimed and that we can relax the pressure. The French view is that, to the contrary, we now have proof that Iran was lying. It had a nuclear weapons program in the past and could have one again. The fact that it suspended the program shows that pressure works. This evidence gives us more reason for maintaining that pressure. France continues to believe in the efficacy of sanctions.

¶3. (C) French MFA DAS-equivalent for the Middle East Franck Gellet, meanwhile, reacted to the demarche with a mixture of incredulity and consternation -- incredulity because we had gone public with the NIE,s findings and consternation because it would create a &public affairs problem.8 Accompanied by Iran desk officer Arnaud Pescheux and nuclear non-proliferation desk officer Arnaud Mentre (from the Strategic Affairs directorate), Gellet fired off a number of questions. He sought to dissect the demarche, as he had when we presented the message on sanctions against the IRGC and certain Iranian companies and personalities. He and the desk officers had clearly read through the information we had passed. We spent considerable time discussing the nature of an NIE, the process for preparing one, the information used in an NIE (which partly seemed designed to determine whether this one drew on French information), and the decision to go public with an unclassified version of the NIE.

¶4. (S) In his response, Gellet made the following points:

--He agreed with the gist of the releasable paper on Iran,s anticipated reaction and observed that it was good we had shared it with Germany as well as France and the UK, since Germany remains a challenge in Europe in terms of maintaining a tough line on Iran. Gellet and his colleagues noted, however, that the reaction elsewhere in Europe was to question the tough line &we8 have taken these past few years.

--It was not clear how France would respond publicly, although Gellet expected the MFA spokesperson to be asked about the NIE. He said he had not been involved in drafting any guidance and suggested the MFA officials following this issue needed to study the NIE text more closely. (Comment:

As of COB December 4, we had not seen the transcript from the daily MFA press briefing.)

--He asked whether we had shared or had considered sharing with our P-5 1 partners ahead of time our decision to issue the unclassified version of the NIE. We did not respond directly but referred to press reporting that speculated the unusual decision to release an unclassified version was predicated on concern that the judgments would leak to the media and be distorted or presented in a way that did not provide full context.

--Gellet faulted the emphasis on Iran,s &intentions8 as well as its capabilities. He opined that it would have been simpler to have kept the focus on capabilities, whereas the reference to intentions in terms of possible resumption of a nuclear weapons program was overly subjective. Mentre added that the continuation of uranium enrichment as described mostly makes sense in the context of a continuing weapons program.

--Gellet was very curious about Israel,s reaction to the NIE. Mentre pointed to preliminary media reporting that some Israeli officials had already differed with the NIE,s conclusions.

15. (C) We sought repeatedly to bring the conversation back to the points in the non-paper underscoring our unchanging assessment that Iran poses a danger to the world and that it has the ability to resume a weapons program given its technological capabilities and industrial infrastructure. Gellet and his colleagues did not dispute the argument but believed skeptics elsewhere would use the NIE to advance their viewpoint to counter that the U.S. (and possibly

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France) only sought confrontation with Iran. As proponent of one of the hardest of the hard line, France would have a more difficult time with critics of its policy within the EU.

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